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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4547
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3183
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7691
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1772
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5103
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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SUBJECT: Presidential Referendum, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories,
Iraq (5/25-28)

¶1. Summary: The main focus in Syrian papers over the weekend was on the presidential referendum on president Asad's new term in office. Papers cited statements by Syrian officials praising President Asad's achievements during his first term in office.

On May 27, papers featured statements by Minister of Information Mohsen Bilal and Foreign Minister Mouallem who talked to journalists after casting their votes for President Asad. Minister of Information Bilal said that "Syria has never seen masses like the ones who have gathered spontaneously to affirm their commitment to sovereignty, security and stability and show their adherence to defeating occupation." Bilal added that "these masses send a message to the whole world that President Asad represents sovereignty, steadfastness, national spirit and courage, and that he also embodies the struggle to restore occupied lands including the Golan, and the struggle to establish a free, independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital." FM Mouallem said that Syrian foreign policy under the leadership of President Asad was linked to citizens' rights and interests, and that the firm principles of that policy are related to liberating occupied lands, supporting the resistance and the independence of decision-making. On events in northern Lebanon, Mouallem told journalists that Syria has no relation to the so called Fatah al-Islam saying this it is a terrorist movement that is wanted in Syria and its leader is wanted by the Syrian security apparatus. Mouallem clarified that "on May 10th this movement issued a statement threatening to launch operations against Syria."

In their coverage of events in north Lebanon, Syrian papers noted the cautious calm in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp. Government-owned Al-Ba'th cited a statement by spokesman of Fatah al-Islam group saying that his group is determined to continue the fight until the end. Al-Ba'th reported that "American military aid began arriving in Beirut through a direct airlift." The paper also cited Hizballah Secretary General Hasan Nasrallah warning against "turning Lebanon into an area of conflict to serve US strategy."

Government-owned Tishreen on May 27 reported that "six military cargo planes loaded with ammunition headed toward Lebanese territory." The paper quoted the CNN as saying that "American officials stressed that these planes will arrive in Lebanon today or

tomorrow to re-supply the Lebanese forces with ammunition to fight the fundamentalist militias in Nahr al-Bared camp."

Independent al-Watan on May 27 featured an interview with Lebanese President Emil Lahoud praising Syrian-Lebanese relations describing them "historic and brotherly." He said "these relations must be an example in this world that searches for basis of dialogue amidst its struggles." Lahoud pointed out that Syria had made initiatives to stop the civil war in Lebanon since its beginning in 1975, while others worked in the opposite direction to transform Lebanon into a continuous battlefield, which has cost the Lebanese people dearly. He stated that all the Lebanese realize the essence of the Syrian initiatives started by President Hafez al-Assad to stop the destruction in Lebanon.

Independent al-Watan on May 27 reported US military shipments to the Lebanese Army quoting political observers as saying that "contrary to the American allegations," most of these supplies are sent to meet the needs of 60-80 American commandoes who will come to Lebanon and deploy secretly in Al-Qulay'at airport in the north. Political observers said this American force "will carry out security investigations and special operations in Lebanon."

Government-owned Tishreen on May 27 cited a statement by former Lebanese Defense Minister Abd-al-Rahim Murad seeing that "American fingers are behind events in the north. In a statement to the paper, Murad said the governing team "is trying to cover up its failure and impotence" by leveling accusations at Syria.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Syrians have their say today. VP Shara: A national guarantee. VP Attar: A model of ultimate faith in the necessity of achieving Arab

causes. Assistant Regional Secretary of the Baath Arab Socialist Party Bkheitan: A Message to the Whole World. Prime Minister Ottri: Expression of national choice. Defense Minister Turkmani: President Asad leads Syria to the highest ranks of dignity and glory" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/28)

"Syrian armed forces vote in the referendum on a new constitutional term for President Asad" (Government-owned Al-

"Interior Minister: "The turnout for the referendum was huge" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/28)

"The People's Assembly to announce results of the referendum today" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/28)

"Syria Today, one heart and one sound: With you we will complete the march. Yes to the one who said no to submission and surrender" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/27)

"Vice President Najah Attar: "President Asad has dealt with the current circumstances with strength and firmness. Arab and international figures: President Asad did not bow to pressures. Citizen of the Syrian Golan: A guarantee of liberation" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/27)

"Arab figures: The Syrian people's rallying behind President Asad has foiled conspiracies against the region" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/25)

"Head of Fateh al-Islam: The party who attacked us and the Lebanese army is the same" (Independent al-Watan, 5/27)

"Nasrallah warns against turning Lebanon into a battlefield to serve US strategy: Palestinian camps and civilians are red lines... Maintaining the Lebanese army is definite" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/26)

"Hizballah Leader Nasrallah gives another chance to establish a national rescue government" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/26)

"A US military bridge to Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Thawra,

5/25)

"Russia opposes endorsement of the UNSC draft resolution on the International Tribunal under the 7th Chapter" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/26)

"Palestinians discuss possibilities of a ceasefire, while Israel proceeds with its aggression. Martyrdom of five Palestinians in Gaza. Israel arrests a Palestinian minister in Jennin" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/27)

"Death toll of US soldiers in Iraq in May is 93. An attack against a UK military base in Basra. Scores of Iraqis killed in various car bomb explosions" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/27)

"Robert Gates expects a difficult summer in Iraq: No new security plan... No quick progress" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/26)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Yes, to the One Who Said:
No to Surrender and Submission"

Elias Murad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Ba'th, wrote (5/27): "Syrians today say yes to the values that President Asad represents.... We will say yes to President Asad because of the series of no's that he said: No to the plans of hegemony over the region, no to the occupation and to the new Middle East plan, no to the American dictates, no to surrender and submission, and no to those who want to attack the resistance and divide and control the region...."

"Presidency has changed nothing in the personality of President Asad, who adhered to his national and pan-Arab positions in the past seven years and represented the conscience of the Arab public in general and the Syrian public in particular.... Al-Asad also entrenched the culture of resistance and strengthened national unity in Syria...."

"Syrians Give their Decisive Word Today"

Samira al-Masalmeh, a commentator in independent al-Watan wrote (5/27): "Syria's approach to the difficult changes and events in the region and beyond in the past seven years showed President Asad's deep wisdom and ability to address all situations...."

"Al-Asad adhered to Syria's positions and principles and rejected bargaining, blackmail, threats, and surrender to colonialist dictates.... Al-Asad also managed, through his political shrewdness and diplomatic flexibility, to turn Damascus from a besieged city, as the enemies wanted it to be, to a fortress for Arab steadfastness...."

"No Place for Palestinians in
The US Presidential Race"

Maha Sultan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/127): "The main US presidential candidates, Republicans and Democrats, yesterday competed in announcing their absolute support for Israel....None of the candidates mentioned the issue of peace in the Middle East or what he or she will do to establish peace...."

"If these candidates can offer all kinds of support for Israel, they are completely unable to provide the security Israel wants or to resolve the conflict the way it likes...."

"Palestinians will continue to be targeted by Israel and US leaders as long as the international community and the Arab world continue to leave the entire issue to the will of the successive US administrations and Israel behind them...."

"Selective Chaos"

Hanan Hamad, a columnist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/26):
"The US policy is leading the world to the abyss.... What proves this is the US contradictory examples in promoting democracy in the region...."

"Washington completely ignored the issue of democracy in Iraq and in other moderate Arab countries while Palestinians continue to pay the price for their democratic option...."

"The United States is defending the Lebanese government although this government has lost its legitimacy after it turned against its statement and its partners, especially those with whom it forged election alliances...."

"Meanwhile, the United States turns a blind eye to Israel's arrest of democratically elected Palestinian ministers and parliamentarians...."

"And while Washington led the falsely called international community in its refusal to stop the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in July, it today keeps silent on the Zionist raids on Gaza, and we see it establishing an airlift to transfer weapons to the Lebanese

government and Nahr al-Bared in particular under the pretext of supporting the Lebanese Army.... For how long will this selective chaos continue?"

"The Resistance, between two Dates"

Ahmad Hamadah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, said (5/25): "May 25 2000, the day on which most of south Lebanon was liberated, was not an ordinary day in the history of Lebanon and the region.... The July 2006 war created a new strategic environment in the Arab-Israeli conflict and torpedoed the concept that the enemy tried to entrench in the Arab mind over six decades...."

"On 25 May 2000 the experience proved that Israel cannot maintain occupation of the territory it seizes by force no matter what brutal crimes it commits. And in July 2006, the battles proved that the huge arsenals of brutal, advanced, and devastating weapons cannot settle a conflict -- even in its military aspect -- and that those who use these arsenals cannot change elements of the conflict or impose their conditions on the other side...."

"And in both dates, the world realized that brute force cannot conquer nations and that the culture of resistance and opposition to the US-Israeli plan for the region did not and will not fade out because it is deep rooted in the hearts of its proponents. What is happening in Palestine and Iraq provides yet further proof of its dazzling success."

Corbin